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INFERIOR SOCIETY.

We suppose there are few persons who do not believe in 'the deteriorating influence of inferior society.' Even the thoughtless, if made for a moment to think, and the vain, who love to be associated with flatterers, would, if urged to confession, admit the evil they often so heedlessly encounter. But what is inferior society? That is the question which has to be considered, detached from all its surroundings, and finally answered, before we can arrive at definite conclusions to help us forward.

Certain democratic writers of fiction are rather fond of choosing for their heroes and heroines low-born persons, often the mere waifs of society, endowing them with almost superhuman virtues, and a strength of purpose and of innate rectitude which enables them to triumph over all evil temptations, and win for themselves an exalted and honourable position. Far be it from us to say that there have not been such careers as these novelists indicate, bright examples of what can be done under difficulties; but if they were the ordinary rule of circumstances, there would be little need of schools and reformatories, and of the elaborate machinery which governments and individuals put in force to educate and civilise and elevate a nation.

Perhaps only those who have been brought into contact with that most forlorn of all created things, 'a neglected child,' can estimate how much we all owe to early training, to the fostering of good instincts, and the crushing out of evil ones, and can comprehend the terrible disadvantage at which the very ignorant are placed. But the ignorant man or woman who has sense enough to be aware of his or her ignorance, and who eagerly takes advantage of every opportunity of enlightenment, ought not to be classed with those who exert a deteriorating influence when brought into contact with their superiors. On the contrary, such individuals often stimulate for good those to whom they look up for guidance. There could be no learning or moral progress in the

world, if there were not a certain association of teacher and pupil, of the wise and the foolish, the good and the bad.

Now, as in most lives a vast amount of knowledge is almost unconsciously acquired, and surrounding influences go far to mould character, the mingling of different orders of mind to which we have alluded is a great boon to the inferior ones—it is their chance of moral and mental improvement. But there is a danger to the so-called superiors, if their superiority is more apparent than real. Every one has heard the story of the parrot which, having learned on board ship a number of oaths and vulgar phrases, terribly shocked the lady to whom it had been consigned as a present. But the bird was a beautiful creature; and the owner desiring that it should be trained to speak with propriety, sent it to keep company with a more carefully educated parrot belonging to a friend, in the hope that the stranger would forget its oaths and sailors' jargon and acquire a different vocabulary. Alas for the result! The new arrival quickly contaminated the other bird, which learned the objectionable phrases that were so much deplored, without imparting its own pretty little speeches and snatches of song to the culprit.

Perhaps if the indecorous bird had been introduced to two or three properly conducted parrots, instead of to only one, the good influence would have been strong enough to prevail, and the offender might have become a reformed character, instead of the corrupter of another. This old story of the two parrots has always seemed to us to point a moral, and show how necessary it is that in organising our society, the good, when necessarily brought into contact with the evil, should, in numbers or in strength, prevail over the bad.

Few families are so fortunate as never to have experienced the evil of a vicious influence operating on some of its members. It may have been speedily apparent, and speedily vanquished accordingly; or it may have been subtle and specious, and have done great mischief before

it was even suspected. In either case, the sort of 'inferior society' at which we are glancing is quite as likely to have been on what is called a social equality as not. Low-toned people, who corrupt morals by their bad example and evil communications, belong to all stations of life.

How often does it happen that a plausible acquaintance establishes a footing of intimacy with some young person, and without planning any special injury, achieves it nevertheless. There are so many by-paths of alluring aspect in life, but which lead to misery, that we all, and the young especially, are in constant need of the controlling sense of duty to keep us in the high-road. Woe be to those who have a tempter at hand to lure them astray, and to teach them to confound pleasure with happiness, if such tempter wears the mask of friendship, and has won their regard! Those who understand children best, are always alive to the importance attached to the choice of youthful playmates and associates, even from the earliest age. For the exercise of the imitative faculty seems instinctive with most children, and biographies of eminent people, especially autobiographies, constantly reveal the lasting influences set in motion in quite infantile years.

But the imitative faculty is not extinct when childhood is past, and there is an order of shy people who are particularly exposed to the temptations of inferior society. What we call shyness is often very closely allied to pride. There are people who take little or no pleasure in any society in which they do not themselves shine. They forget the high esteem in which a patient and intelligent listener is held by good talkers, and feel hurt at seeming of no consequence. Such shy people are very apt to fall away from the social circles in which they might find mental improvement and enlightenment, and gravitate to a lower scale, where they feel themselves of importance. The worst of the matter is that such persons are almost always self-deceivers, and think their shyness comes from humility instead of pride. Another sort of shyness, springing from another sort of pride, induces people to shun general society altogether; and then they need be on their guard against some baneful individual influence of an inferior sort. This is especially the case with shy young men, who make what are called low marriages, or, what is really morally worse, trifle with the affections of girls in an inferior station. Perhaps at first they mean nothing worse than the gratification of their own vanity; but some of the saddest of sad stories have had this sort of beginning.

We once heard a very shrewd sensible woman, the mother of a large family, speak to the following effect: 'My husband and I are very choice in considering the acquaintances we now make, for our children's sake. Our friends' children will, in the natural course of events, be their friends,

and perhaps even more closely allied, and we feel that we cannot be too particular as to the intimacies we may form.' They were wise words; for the hasty, ill-considered, unfortunate intimacies of youth are often found to be a clog all through life.

Young people whose characters as yet are but partially developed, are very apt to strike up sudden friendships on the basis of some temporary and superficial sympathy which has no real depth. Ardent professions of attachment are made—perfectly sincere for the time being—but often circumstances arise which develop character and change the position of affairs. One mind greatly expands, while the other either stagnates or deteriorates; one moral nature, strengthened by some fiery trial, rises purified; while the other succumbs to some grovelling temptation. It is impossible the tie between the two can remain unstrained, for sooner or later it must be broken. In such cases as these, the lower nature too often reviles the higher for its 'changeableness' and 'caprice,' though probably the change of feeling has been resisted as long as possible, and only acknowledged at last to the conscience with great pain. Well is it if there has been no obligation conferred by the inferior nature on the superior, to be considered a life-long debt incapable of being cancelled.

But there is one sort of 'inferior society' which is perhaps even more 'deteriorating' in its influence than the companionship of low-toned people. If it be true that Books are 'the best of all good company,' the adage can only apply to good books; for it is no whit less true that bad books are the worst of all companions. Many books are very subtle in their evil influence, so subtle, that the mischief they do is long unsuspected. And yet we think there is a test by which we may know the wholesome from the evil in literature. Does the reader feel stronger and wiser—more ready for work and endurance, with a higher ideal of duty and character, and of the possibilities of human life, when he lays down the book which has engaged him? If so, he may be sure that he has enjoyed 'the best of all good company,' and will, moreover, have acquired a distaste for that which is poorer.

The subtle bad book, however, leaves a very different impression. The reader probably rises from it discontented and querulous, inclined to excuse his own faults, as so much more venial than those of the people in whom he has just been interested; with his ideal of duty and human character lowered instead of raised, and with a general sense of disorder in his mind, that proves the unwholesome food it has been receiving. The present writer has assisted at the burning of more than one thoroughly bad book, and is ready to apply the match again whenever it is expedient to do so. We never know into what hands a bad book may some day fall, or what mischief it may occasion; but when we see the pages

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yielding to the flames, at least we feel that with regard to that one copy its power is over. Bad books always deserve condign punishment, and there is a consolation in knowing that sooner or later they will find it. Truth alone prevails in the long-run. Truth, that moral truth which through all the ages finds a response in the higher attributes of the human heart, can alone float a book down the stream of time, and render it a delight to succeeding generations.

VALENTINE STRANGE.

A STORY OF THE PRIMROSE WAY.

CHAPTER XLV.—‘CONSTANCE! MAYBE GOD WILL BE GOOD, AND LET ME SEE YOU HAPPY, AS YOU NEVER COULD HAVE BEEN IN THIS WORLD.’

DAYS before Garling's death, Constance and Val had left Cadiz on their homeward route, and Mary had travelled with them in attendance upon her mistress. Constance had written to her aunt Lucretia, telling her of the new hopes and fears which dwelt about her, and entreating a renewal of her old friendship. The old lady came down, in answer to this letter, to meet her at Southampton, and received her very kindly; but she encountered her ancient favourite Val Strange with inexplicable and inflexible enmity. ‘Don't tell me, my dear,’ she said in answer to her niece's remonstrances; ‘he left you alone at the beginning of your sufferings. I know it all. Everybody has talked about it. He was a faithless friend, to begin with, and he's a bad husband; and I will never speak to him again.’

‘He is not a bad husband,’ Constance answered, weeping. ‘We have had cause for trouble, and we have been unhappy, but never, never, through any want of love on either side! And dear aunt, help us to be happy now. We shall have cause to be happy now.’

Aunt Lucretia wept with her, and relented partially, for Constance's sake. But against Val she was implacable, and she treated him with a distant coldness which pained him deeply. The elder Mr Jolly met the little party in town, having constrained himself to leave Paris in honour of the expected event; for which, without anybody precisely knowing why, he seemed to appropriate to himself an amazing credit.

‘My dear Valentine,’ he said, as Val sat moodily over his wine and a cigar, after dinner, on his first night in England, ‘it has always been my practice to endeavour to make the best of everything. We have proverbs on our side: Love laughs at locksmiths, and All's fair in love and war. And apart from the romantic and sentimental aspect which, to eyes more youthful than mine, the case may wear, I console myself with the reflection that the marriage is a *fait accompli*. Your proceeding, I presume I may acknowledge without any danger of offence, and certainly without any intention of being offensive, was—er—a little startling. But all that is over; and you are prepared to encounter the commonplace of life, and I presume to stay at home, become *custos rotulorum*, and discharge the duties of a good landlord. I have always maintained that the one claim a father has to consideration in affairs of this kind is that he is interested in his daughter's

happiness. I am not without the emotions common to paternity; but I have never been inclined to obtrude my anxieties, and I will not obtrude them now.’

Val said ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ and ‘Of course’—at the right places, for the most part; and Mr Jolly was absolutely satisfied with him, and with himself. When they all left London, he was established in free quarters in Val's house at Brierham; and he felt a pleasurable glow in the fact that this eligible family mansion was henceforth his daughter's home, and that in those days when Paris might seem dull to him, he would find a shelter here. It is perhaps unnecessary to say that had Val been poor instead of wealthy, Mr Jolly's ideas on the moral and sentimental aspect of the elopement might have undergone development in a different direction. Val himself was filled with anxious thoughts; but he too, like Constance, looked for a veritable sacrament of love in the birth of a child. But his emotions were not of that boisterous and thick-skinned quality which can bear to find vent in the presence of strangers; and thus, except in those now rare moments when he and his wife were alone together, he wore rather a morose and preoccupied air. Miss Lucretia set this down to a desire on his part to be away from the place, and charged him in her own heart with a perpetual longing after the fleshpots of a bachelor's Egypt. Not all Constance's faith in her husband's affection, nor Val's own constant presence in the house, could weaken this belief of hers. Women can be amazingly cruel on occasion, and the old maiden lady relented not to Val. He bore everything with patience, even with seeming apathy, strengthened inwardly by new hopes, and chastened by fears new and old.

In the midst of all this, news reached him that Gerard Lumby had returned, and had again taken up his residence at Lumby Hall. Before Constance had recalled him to her side, he had fallen into such a mood that he would not greatly have cared had he been called upon to expiate his falsity to friendship with his life. But now he had a reason for living, and he meant to live. He listened anxiously for tidings of Gerard and his manner of living; and such small items of news as reached him were reassuring. The defeated rival seemed at length to have settled down, accepting his defeat. Val had no wish to remember against him that wild night in the Mediterranean. He knew he had given horrible provocation; and he even looked to his own devotion to Constance as one means of appeasing Gerard's hatred. He laid plans for the future, and resolved, if things went well with him, that he would migrate to another county. He did himself more justice when he admitted that Gerard would find it unpleasant to have him for a constant neighbour; and since it seemed well that one of them should move to a distance, it seemed well that he should be the emigrant. He had robbed Gerard of enough already. He would not rob him of the house in which his ancestors had lived so long, by poisoning the air about it.

Let me say once more that Val Strange was not meant by nature to live disloyally. But fate is just, and his very virtues tore him.

Gerard in Cadiz had asked Hiram one question:

'Is she here?' Mary's unlooked-for presence had dictated this inquiry.

'She is,' Hiram had responded. 'She's goin' to England, and her husband's with her.'—Gerard started, and paled ever so little; but Hiram watched him with glittering eyes which missed nothing.—'They're going home for a special purpose. I reckon if it turns out a son, that when he's grown up, he'd like to feel he'd been born in the ancestral halls. Anyhow,' added Hiram, 'I guess I should, if I was going to be born over again as a British aristocrat.'

Not even Hiram had rightly estimated the purposes which moved Gerard to the reckless and horrible revenge he had once attempted. He was not avenging his own wrongs, but the wrongs done to Constance by her husband's desertion of her. He did not understand, he did not even dream, that the thought of his own sufferings, and their disloyalty to him, had cast the shadow which lay like an impassable barrier between man and wife. To his mind, Val had been doubly a traitor—false to him, and false to the woman he had stolen from him. It was the belief in the second falsity which had stirred him to the contemplation of that crime which it was Hiram's happy fortune to frustrate. It was not likely that Val's return to his old home after so remarkable a disappearance from it, should go untalked of. The general verdict had been unfavourable to him at his going, and it was unfavourable still. Had Miss Lucretia's tongue been less active, it might have been otherwise; for a wealthy, good-looking, good-tempered young fellow, who has the loveliest woman in a county for his wife, is likely to be popular, and to find more serious crimes than a runaway marriage forgiven him. Even the parting at Naples, and Val's extended cruises in the Levant, would have been condoned and forgotten; but it was murmured everywhere that Mrs Strange's aunt knew the naughty secret of their parting—that Val was guilty, and that she was implacable. After the lapse of a year from the date of his tragedy, foolish people felt justified in hinting at these things even in Gerard's presence, and the rumours reached him in a hundred ways.

A slow, bitter, awful fire of wrath burned in the young man's heart. By nature and descent, loyal and honest, but by nature and descent disposed to nurse revenge, his native virtue and his native vice of blood alike spurred him to hate his enemy. He said of himself, and it was true, that he would have roasted at a slow fire, rather than have deceived a friend as Val had deceived him. His own purity of honour made Val's dishonour all the viler. Yet even then, had Val continued true to Constance, and had she seemed happy with him, there was enough of heathen valour in the man to have hidden hatred and heartburning for a lifetime. But now, to his distorted gaze, Revenge stood consecrated by Hate and Scorn. He could leave Garling to the vengeance, or even the mercy of heaven, without an inward struggle. But Garling had not sought to rob him of his love; and Garling had missed his own prize, and had grown old on a sudden, and was near death's door, and had but a tottering reason left him; whereas this supreme criminal had succeeded in his crime, and having stolen his treasure, had thrown it

away. We know how false the popular talk was; but he did not. It found ready credence with him, and there was no baseness, however unexampled, of which he was not ready to believe that Val Strange had been or would be guilty.

But he, like the rest of us, was led by a way he knew not.

As the hoped-for yet dreaded time grew nearer in the house at Brierham, Val and Constance grew nearer to each other in confidence and affection. They looked forward, though with certain tremblings and forebodings, to a happy and united life. The child would lay a hand on each, and would hold them together to all times. But Val knew nothing of the county talk, and his moody troubled face bore no disguise that the dull wits of visitors and servants could be expected to look through.

The weather for many days past had been close and sultry, and had brought with it a feeling of depression, which affected both husband and wife. And now the time fraught with so much of desire and dread came on, and Val waited for news in the room in which Hiram Search first met him. For a time the messengers who found him waiting there, brought reassuring news enough; but in a while he was left altogether alone, staring out at the sultry noonday sky and the shadowless noonday fields. He waited a long time, and then rang the bell and asked for news. The messenger returned with an ominous face and an equivocal message; and after another anxious terrible pause of an hour, which seemed a year in its prolonged suspense, he was confronted by the doctor. 'Well?' he said. That was all. It was recorded against him afterwards, though the stern, almost savage brevity of the question meant Love on the rack.

'I may congratulate you on one side, Mr Strange,' returned the doctor; 'though on the other I am afraid there is scarcely room for hope.' Val looked at him stonily and said nothing. It was all set down against him with the rest, though his very heartstrings ached. 'Mrs Strange has implored me to allow her to see you. I am sure I need not ask you to be self-possessed, though I fear it can make little difference.'

There was a dryness in his throat and a fire in his eyes, as Val followed the doctor through the long corridor and up the stairs. A moment later, Constance reached feeble arms towards him.

'You have always loved me,' she whispered, 'in spite of the shadow that fell between us.'

'Always,' he answered huskily. 'I shall love you till I die.' He buried his piteous face in the pillow beside her, and those were the last words she heard in this world. The lax arm that lay across his neck told him the truth; but he did not move until some one entered and touched him on the shoulder. Then he arose and looked at the face before him for a minute, and walked away without a tear or a kiss or a murmur. It told against him in the common foolish tale; but in his soul lay the unutterable burden of coming hopeless years, and whatever broken gleam of light the world had held for him seemed at that moment to go out—for ever.

The doctor left the house of mourning, and was called to another case. He carried the news

with him; and before it was two hours old, Gerard Lumby heard it. He had shown grief once, and was on his guard now, and his Spartan heart carried him away alone to the rocky slope of Welbeck Head. To die loveless—the woman he had loved. If the man had loved her and been faithful to her, he could have borne to see her happy. As he thought this, and grief and hatred inextinguishable fore his heart, he sat upon a gray boulder, so still that he might have seemed a statue, in spite of the storm within. And behind him a pall as black as Death climbed up the western heaven, and blotted out the sun, and touched the zenith, and spread out and down until it draped the sky from west to east and from north to south. There was no sign of wind; but the vast sheet of cloud crept onward as if by its own volition, throwing forward great ragged feelers of the colour of red-hot copper. By-and-by this hue, as of heated metal, spread over all the doleful under-sky, and the face of the heavens was livid, as though some gigantic fury were held back there by the strong spirit of a god. Then, without further warning, before one drop of rain had fallen, or one sigh of wind had spoken to the ear, a flash of lightning fell, and close upon it came a roar so near, so sudden and so terrible, that he leaped to his feet, and whilst it lasted felt his own passions stricken deaf and dumb and blind. The rain lashed him like a whip, and the wind released, swept out of the western darkness with gusts against which he felt it difficult to stand. The lightning and the thunder seemed one, they came so close together; and the echoes of the first tremendous peal were still buffeting windily from rock to rock, when another came upon them, and smote their mockeries dead with overwhelming sound; and again the ferocious echoing laughter of the hills broke out, and again the thunder slew it, and again it rose, till the clamour seemed scarcely less of earth than heaven. And amidst all this, his passions rose from stupor, and leaped to madness, and for once in a life the forces of nature seemed strained to find voice for a human soul.

As he stood thus, resigned in unmeasured inward tempest to the storm, he saw on a sudden that he was not alone upon the headland; and in the next flash that split the gloom and held the landscape quivering whilst he might have counted three, he knew the figure of the man he hated. Val Strange was there, scarce fifty yards away, flying upwards along the broken path. Not knowing why he followed, Gerard sprang after him. It was as yet no more than evening; but the storm had cast a shadow which anticipated night, and the lightning was needed to show the way. In the deep gloom which followed every flash, he lost the flying figure; but with each succeeding flash it seemed cast out of night again, no nearer and no further than before. Strain as he would, he could not decrease the distance which separated them by a single yard. He never paused in the intensity in which every fibre of soul and body was set upon the chase, to think of a reason for his enemy's presence there. There was no thought within him apart from those the tempest spoke for him of madness and revenge. When he fell, as he did often, he felt no shock or pain. The storm gave the sole

counsel he heeded, and seemed to lift him on its wing, and yet with equal power to guide the other's footsteps.

Tempest-borne, pursuer and pursued fled upward. They were far past the Hollow, which lay below them on the right of their course, and from the first till now they had taken a precipitate road, a mere sheep-track, shunned by the feet of men. The subtle fluid showed the broad bare shoulder of the headland, and they were within three hundred yards of the sheer edge. Here for a second the hunted figure paused, and Gerard seeing this, paused also. In that second, he knew his purpose for the first time, and consciously surveyed it. Though they fell together, he would cast this villain over the precipice. He kept his eyes on the spot where he had last seen his quarry, until the lightning cast him out of the dark again, and then he saw that he was moving slowly onward. Gerard followed slowly, and they kept their distance still. And now the storm began to decrease in violence, and as he reached the summit of the Head, the pursuer saw that all along the western sea-line there was a yellow gleam of light, and that the clouds had broken there in scattered rags of purple, which trailed over a sky of tarnished gold. He saw, too, that this rift of gold was growing larger, and that in a little while the storm would cease almost as suddenly as it had fallen. Here, on the bare scalp of the headland, there was a gruesome twilight cast from the breach in the western clouds, and the lightning showed paler in it than it had done below, against the darkness of the higher skies.

He saw these things as one who did not see them, and all his thought was of the man ahead and how to stalk him. To go on at a rush might be fatal to his purpose; for he knew, from many a trial in boyhood and youth, that Val Strange was fleetest of foot than he, and could out-distance and outlast him. So, with a cold deadliness of intent, as absorbing as the heat and passion of pursuit had been, he chose his ground, and crept from boulder to boulder, nearer and nearer. The rain had ceased to fall, and only now and again the lightning hung out its shuddering flame. The thunder rumbled miles and miles behind. The slower pace, the caution of the trail, and the cessation of the tempest, seemed to fit his mood anew, as completely as the wild chase and the tumult within had kept the tumult without in unison. He was within half a score of yards now from his quarry, and he crawled a little forward and coiled himself for a spring, when a wild voice broke on the late-born stillness.

'Good-bye all!' it cried. 'Good-bye to the world I did the devil's work in. Good-bye to the trusting friend I stabbed to the heart. God bless him. O Gerard, Gerard! And oh, my love, my love!' and the wild voice quavered down into sobs and murmured on brokenly. 'And the little baby four hours old. Good-bye. You won't know how your father died. They won't think the cold-hearted villain who played his friend so false, had the heart to die like this; or the heart to break as mine is broken. Constance! maybe God will be good, and let me see you happy, as you never could have been in this world.' The voice pealed out again madly, 'Good-bye—good-bye—good-bye, all!' and a staggering

step scattered the loose pebbles. Not six yards from the edge of the precipice lay a murderous figure coiled for a spring, and when the next staggering step came on, the spring was made. The suicide was caught in a grip of steel, and a voice cried out: 'Not that way, Val! Not that way!' And they were weeping wildly in each other's arms.

Gaelic Proverbs.

'TELL me the proverbs of a people, and I will tell you what manner of people they be.' These little pointed sayings, in which a single flash of wit strikes fire from the gathered experience of past generations, give us a wonderful insight into the interior life of a nation. Reversing Burns's lines, we seem to be endowed with the gift of seeing our neighbours as they appear to themselves. In proverbs and familiar sayings, we have pictures of household manners and customs drawn by the people themselves, in perfect simplicity and unconsciousness; we catch glimpses of the farm, the chase; or, in more cynical mood, some little failing or weakness is revealed to us with quiet humour. And all this tells us more than whole volumes of travel, about the thoughts and feelings which lead to action, and the habits which are wont to be formed under these influences.

The collection of Gaelic Proverbs edited by Sheriff Nicolson, and published by MacLachlan and Stewart, of Edinburgh, is of singular interest, inasmuch as it opens up an almost unknown field of research, and preserves the memory of a state of things now past, or rapidly passing away. Where written records are few, as is the case among the Highlanders, proverbial lore seems to gain an added value. The book is based upon a collection published in 1785, which has hitherto been the only work of the kind in existence. It was made by the Rev. Donald Macintosh, who describes himself in his will as 'a priest of the old Scots Episcopal Church, and last of the non-jurant clergy of Scotland.' The book before us is carefully edited, with notes and illustrations drawn from varied sources; and the writer has a warm appreciation of the fine points in the Celtic character. The sayings are collated with those of other nations, which adds much to the interest of the subject. We find, as we might expect, a strong family resemblance between the proverbs of all the Celtic nations. Most of the more characteristic sayings are to be found in an Irish dress; and there are also parallels from the Welsh, Manx, and Breton languages. 'The Irishman's wit is on his tongue, but the Gael is wise after the time,' is a true distinction; and it is supplemented by the Manx: 'The Manxman is never wise till the day after the fair.' But what is very curious is, that we meet with many old familiar friends, apparently quite at home in their new surroundings. For instance, the saying, 'Every man knows best where his shoe hurts him,' is said to be as old as Plutarch; and every great European nation—even the Celt with his shoes of hide, and light step on the heather—has adopted the same form in speaking of a secret trouble.

Mr Nicolson is inclined to trace back the

origin of such sayings as have equivalents in Lowland Scotch, to the days before the reign of Malcolm Canmore, when some one or other form of Gaelic was probably the language of the whole of Scotland, with the exception of the Lothians. But then the Lowland Scotch is a direct representative of the old Angles, who held the Lothians during the period referred to, and has a perfect right to the paternity of its own proverbs. Then, again, there are those sayings which have parallels in the proverbs of continental nations. Doubtless, as Mr Nicolson suggests, Scotland had no want of communication with the continent of Europe, and the old French alliance has left distinct marks in this country. Many priests also were foreigners; and some of the young chieftains may have gone to the universities of Holland or Italy for their education. Still, this explanation seems inadequate in many cases; and looking to the large amount of proverbial wisdom which is common to all the nations of Latin or Teutonic origin, one is inclined to wonder if perhaps the original sayings were popular before the great migrations of our race, just as we find a common inheritance of fairy tales whose birthplace may be traced to the far East. To take two or three instances, pretty much at random: 'Well knows the mouse that the cat's not in the house,' is found in eight other languages; 'The blind of an eye is king among the blind,' has seven equivalents; 'Moss grows not on an oft-turned stone,' is found in Greek and Latin and nine other European languages. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to decide to what source we should look for the original root; but if any one could tell us how many of these widespread proverbs are to be found in Sanscrit, or in the modern languages of India, we might have some grounds for forming a theory how they arose.

Again, the experiences of our several lives, though they may differ widely in their surroundings, are curiously alike in essentials; and it may well be that one reason for the similarity of proverbs is, that all mankind have to learn the same lessons, calling the same qualities into play, and that they find the results of their summing-up not so very different after all. Such is the following: 'There will come in a day what won't in an age.' This is common to modern Greek, Latin, Italian, French, and English. It is an entirely abstract proposition; there is no picturesqueness of allusion to catch the fancy; it is evidently drawn in each case from the deep wells of experience. In other cases, we meet with some central truth which seems to express the universal conviction of mankind, but which becomes clothed in strong local colouring, varying according to the varying circumstances of the people who give it expression. The proverb about counting one's chickens is transformed, among a race to whom the hillside was more familiar than the poultry-yard, into the caution, 'Don't skin the deer till you get it.' The Lowlanders went to the Highlands for a comparison, 'It's ill taking the breeks off the wild Highlandman,' which becomes peaceable enough in the Gaelic, 'It's ill taking horns from the hornless cow.'

In these proverbs, we are introduced to a people very much the reverse of the popular idea of the fierce and haughty Highlander of days of yore. There is much of the nobleness and generosity

of sentiment befitting a warlike race; but the people themselves are tillers of the soil, owners of flocks and herds, fishers on the sea. Poor they are, but full of patient cheerfulness, as may be seen in the saying illustrating their belief in the wise balance of things: 'In spring, when the sheep is lean, the shellfish is fat.' The numerous allusions to shellfish show how often the dwellers by the sea-shore were dependent on what they could find there. But in spite of the hardships of their every-day life, they are full of intelligence, with high conceptions of right and duty; they are close observers of nature; and many of their sayings have about them a shrewd and quaint simplicity, which has a flavour all its own.

There is a chivalry of feeling in their ideas of warfare, which is far removed from barbarism. True, there is a grim humour in the following: 'The Lowlander is the shorter from losing his head.' But many proverbs show a true sense of justice and honour, worthy of a knight of old. Here are two Ossianic sayings, both remarkable for their forbearance: 'Fingal never fought a fight without offering terms;' 'Neither seek nor shun the fight.' This is a noble motto for a sword: 'Draw me not without cause, nor return me without honour.' Again: 'Honour is a tender thing;' 'Honour is nobler than gold.' Many a Highland glen is deserted now where brave men used to dwell; but the old pledge, 'The clans of the Gael, shoulder to shoulder,' still wakens a hearty response from Highland regiments wherever strong arms and stout hearts are needed for the honour of Britain.

There are some interesting illustrations of clan-ship. 'To whom can I make my complaint and no Clanranald in Moidart?' originally said of the Clanranald who was killed at the battle of Sheriffmuir, has about it a touching wail of hopelessness. The following gives us a curious glimpse of a state of society long since passed away: 'It is not every day that Macintosh holds a court.' Macintosh of Monyvaird, Chamberlain to the Earl of Perth, held a regality court at Monyvaird; but it is commonly reported that he caused one person to be hanged each court-day, in order to make himself famous and to strike terror into the thieves, which severity occasioned the above saying. All readers of the *Fair Maid of Perth* will remember the cry, 'Another for Hector!' with which the heroic old foster-father devoted one after another of his sons to death for their chief. These words were really spoken at the battle of Inverkeithing (1652), where Hector Roy McLean of Duart was killed with hundreds of his clan. The attachment of foster-brothers is most marked: 'Dear is a kinsman, but the pith of the heart is a foster-brother.' Scarcely less strong is the sense of relationship: 'All the water in the sea won't wash out our kinship.' Yet, when we come to the various characteristics of the clans described by each other, they are almost always unfavourable: 'A McLean without boast, a McDonald without cleverness, a Campbell without pride, are ill to find.' Again: 'McLaine of Loch Buy, the chieftain of thieves.' The McGregors, however, are always mentioned with respect: 'Hills and streams and McAlpines; but when did the McArthurs come?' and again: 'There never was a clown of the McGregors.' Some districts also come in for a share of the same bad character:

'What the Mull-man sees, he covets; what the Mull-man covets, the Coll-man steals; and what the Coll-man steals, the Tree-man hides.'

We naturally expect to find a strong flavour of the sea derived from the Hebrides and the adjacent shores of the mainland; and the proverbs which come to us from this source are among the most racy and original of all. 'No wind ever blew that did not fill some sail,' is an improved form of the familiar, 'It's an ill wind that blows nobody good.' Making needless difficulties is happily described as 'Making a great ocean of a narrow strait.' For a man who piques himself on being always wiser than his neighbours, it is said: 'He knows where the whales breed.' For one who seems fated never to be in luck: 'When the herring is in the north, Red Malcolm is in the south.' Here is a brave and cheery utterance, peculiarly suggestive of the narrow seas, where the tide is a power not to be lightly set at nought: 'None ever got tide with him that did not get it against him.' Nor is the wind forgotten: 'I shall go to-morrow, said the king. You shall wait for me, said the wind.' What a world of suggestive tenderness and pathos lies in the following: 'There is hope of the man at sea, but none of the man in the churchyard!' To these may be added the following graphic little story. The small Hebridean islands of Ulva and Gometra are divided by a narrow channel, which is passable at low water. On one occasion, when the minister who had gone over to Gometra to preach—intending afterwards to return to Mull—was in the midst of his sermon, he was summarily interrupted by the beadle with the warning: 'Get on, Master John—the channel is filling!'

We turn with interest to inquire what weather folk-lore may be gathered from this new source, and we find that the testimony of the Gael does not differ greatly from that of the other dwellers in our island. This is very generally found to be true: 'Winter comes not till after New Year, nor spring till after St Patrick's Day' (March 17). The following shows the usual distrust of a too early spring, and is very gracefully expressed: 'For every song the mavis sings in February, she'll lament ere spring be over.' Another saying worth quoting is: 'A month from the first ear to the full ear, and a month from the full ear to the withered [ripened] ear.' The following excellent advice to husbandmen shows a remarkable insight into the true principles of agriculture: 'To feed the land before it get hungry, to give it rest before it grow weary, to weed it well before it get dirty—the marks of a good husbandman.' The proverb about 'far-away birds,' and Campbell's line about the enchanting effects of distance, are both paralleled in the saying: 'Blue are the hills that are far from us.' The Gael has also a proverb instinct with the breath of freedom: 'There is no smoke in the lark's house.'

Here are two curious proverbs: 'It would be something for one man, but it's a small thing for two, as Alexander the Proud said about the world.' And again: 'She is as good at spinning as the Greek woman.' The latter seems to allude to Penelope; and both are interesting (supposing they are not quite modern), as showing that the Highlanders had some knowledge of Greek tales.

This is also evidenced by the frequent occurrence of such names as Hector, Æneas, and Alexander. We have never seen any satisfactory explanation of this.

As specimens of the quiet yet keen humour in which these proverbs abound, take the following: 'The cock was very bountiful with the horse's corn;' 'Tis the less for that, the less for that, as the wren said when he sipped a billful out of the sea.' But even as he smiles, the Gael knows that inevitable Fate lies in wait for him; and the consciousness of this is seldom long absent from him. 'One must go where his grave awaits him,' for 'No man can avoid the spot where birth or death is his lot.' And, 'For whom ill is fated, him it strikes.' But in a nobler mood, we have: 'A man's will is his kingdom;' and, 'A bad man makes his own destiny;' for 'Short-lived is all rule but the rule of God.' And to sum up all, let us quote this beautiful and profound saying: 'Not less in God's sight is the end of the day than the beginning.'

The time will come—and under the influence of universal travel and School Boards it is approaching rapidly—when Gaelic will cease to be a spoken language, and will share the fate of its sisters, the Manx and Cornish. Yet it will always have an interest for antiquaries and philologists; and such collections of its proverbial folk-lore as this before us help to save for the coming generations what would otherwise be probably for ever lost.

THE STORY OF INEZ.

'EASY stages each day up the coast-line of California. Slowly over the steep hills which lay in rank like breakers rolling on the shore; down the other side at a helter-skelter gallop; breakfasting in lonely fishermen's huts, with the sweet surf-music coming to us with the sun through the open door and windows, and dining at rude wayside stations and homelike farmhouses. This was our daily programme; a very pleasant one to carry out.

'Yet the balmy breezes, bringing sometimes spicy perfumes from the pine-clad slopes of the coast-range mountains, and again blowing dreamily from the south-west, failed to call to the cheeks of our sister the bloom that had been there. We idolised our sister, and we do yet, and always shall; and we shall always do everything—in or out of our paths—which will aid in the restoration of her health and happiness.

'The cause, you ask?

'We say little of that among ourselves, and we say less outside; but we clench our fists and tap our revolver-handles meaningly when there seems a resemblance in the faces of those we meet occasionally, to a villain who in designedly blasting the heart's hope of our sister, has made us his lifelong enemies. Our ancestors gave us, among other traits—some good, some bad—a vindictiveness of spirit that is as tenacious as life itself. They could not help it; neither can we. They came over with Cortez, and at the close of their

glorious conquering, settled in the Californian peninsula; where are indeed to this day the original estates in the possession of lineal descendants. Yes! a Spanish American can forgive, though it be against the grain; but he can never forget. In this matter we can neither forgive nor forget the rascally adventurer who has cast a black shadow over our peaceful household.

'In the autumn there came to the hacienda a handsome young English naval officer—on sick-leave, so he said—to whom with ready hospitality we offered the shelter of our roof.

'Frolicsome, mirthful, and an accomplished musician, he speedily gained entrance to our simple ways and simple hearts, and was treated as one of ourselves. We did not know then how happy we were; we know now by the contrast. He was soon conspicuous in the vintage festivals, treading the luscious, purple grapes in the great tubs, side by side with the girls of the valley (a privilege they denied my brother José and myself), and always the leader in the gay dances that succeeded. Yet we did not grow jealous—we are only jealous of those we mistrust. We boys of the peacefully happy Sonora valley still basked in the sweet smiles of the señoritas, though we knew that their sweetest smiles and their sweetest words were reserved for the stranger—our friend.

'None of our companions had gained the love of Inez. They dared not speak to her of that, though a score of them had aching hearts and were sinking into chronic melancholy. They would bring in the skins of the grizzly bear and the 'mountain lion' as proofs of their valour, without exciting in her breast even a temporary admiration for themselves or their achievements. She would only say: "What a pity to kill those poor, harmless beasts!" Then the despairing gallant would mount his waiting mustang and rush madly away. She notably differed from her own flesh and blood. Long years ago, there had been a wreck, and we had saved from it a large collection of English books. As soon as she learned to speak and read in your tongue, she commenced poring over these mysterious attractions. They were 'mysterious' to us, because we could not understand why there could be any better amusement than frolicsome horse-back rides over the vine-clad hills and dales of the country around, mirthful dances at the harvest-feast, and rollicking trips in white-winged yachts.

'Roger Ayrtoun—that was his name—quickly discovered the intimate acquaintance Inez had with the English language and the authors of his motherland, and we were more than ever mystified at the conspicuous concord there was in their views. We soon learned that she was made happy by Roger's presence, and when he spoke of leaving, we endeavoured to dissuade him; for was it not our only object to contribute to her happiness? He was not behind in showing a lively pleasure in being with her; and their chats were of the merriest sort imaginable, when they sat on the wide veranda fronting the bay, looking out on the brown sails of the fishing-boats. Could he have been thinking of her, or of a lady-love far away,

when he sang blithely after leaving her side one night:

O thou moon that shinest,
Argent clear above,
All night long enlighten,
My sweet lady-love!

Might we not induce him to stay with us in the valley, if her happiness depended on it? We owned plenty of fine land, and if he married Inez, we would give him all he needed; besides, her ample dowry. We had no chance to ascertain this, for there came by a special messenger from San Francisco a summons to rejoin his ship immediately; and with a quiet but seemingly sincere farewell, he departed, promising to get an extension of leave and come back at once. And then the light faded out of her eyes, and there was but a sad smile when we spoke of Roger. Months flew quickly, and no tidings came from him whom we now characterised as a base, heartless villain—the thief of a precious affection. On going to Frisco, I found his ship had sailed for the China station, and I had to come back to the ranche with the tale. She said little—"Oh, Pedro!" and then after a while: "Can it be that he was only trifling with me?" There was no light left in her eyes then, and there were no smiles. She seemed to sink under the weight of her trouble; brain-fever set in, and her frail spirit battled long for mere life. When convalescence came, after weeks of anxious watching and nursing, we came here in pursuance of our physician's orders; and this then is our reason for apparently idling our time away here.

Told in a mixture of Spanish and English, which I liberally translate, and in musically passionate tones, accompanied with the fiery gesticulation peculiar to his race, Pedro's tale impressed us considerably. How fondly he would stroke his heavy moustache at the memory of the bright-eyed valley señoritas, and what a cold, deadly glitter in his eyes at the mention of the lieutenant. Though the departure of their ancestors from sunny Spain dated back three or four centuries, these boys gave unmistakable evidence of the source of the hot blood with which their veins were filled.

'Were I an insurance man,' whispered my companion, who had been critically scanning Pedro's lithe, sinewy limbs—'were I an insurance man, I would ask a premium of at least nine-tenths of the whole amount of insurance in assuring that lieutenant's life against casualties;' and I unhesitatingly acquiesced.

Notwithstanding the marks of deep suffering on the sister's face, there was unmistakable evidence of unsullied beauty, and the trio speedily possessed our confidence and sympathy. We, too, were recuperating in the little seaport town.

Several days after this revelation to us, through Pedro, of the origin of her sickness, we were informed that he was to start for the city—San Francisco—and judging from his grim manner the object of the trip, we finally discovered that the lieutenant's ship was expected to arrive within a day or two from her cruise. There was something ominous in his mission, and we found, almost unconsciously, ourselves fretting about it as Pedro went forth with a set determination impressed on his swarthy visage, notwithstanding his sister's feeble remonstrances.

Jerkily pacing the floor of the deserted mess-room; stooping at times to look through the port-holes, eastward over the watery expanse; uttering impatient words and exhibiting various outward signs of discomposure and anxiety—this is the frame of mind possessing Lieutenant Ayrton as we examine his well-made form and rather intellectual countenance. His brother-officers having finished dinner, have gone on deck, and he has driven out the cabin-boy, who would clear away the debris, so as to get a chance to have a bit of soliloquy. He has been triumphantly successful in his endeavours, and save the appearance around the door's edge, at very long intervals, of the dish-wiping youngster's head, he is not reminded of the existence, by sight, anyway, of any of his fellow-mortals.

'I should have sent my letter to Inez by a special messenger, and not trusted to the dilatory and unsafe mail,' he says.

'What if it has never reached her! Still, it must have. To-morrow we reach Frisco, and the very next stage will carry me to Sonorada.'

Again he breaks out: 'Confound it! Why did we not cruise near some port from whence I might have sent information of my whereabouts? Always that odious junk-chasing, with no loot, no prize-money—nothing. One thing I have determined to do; it is this: Inez will marry me, and I'll settle in the valley and live the contented life of a ranchero. I can buy a small ranche, and we will be happy—so happy. After a while we shall travel about. There can be good achieved there in many ways, and it is far better to spend my life doing it than making miserable mathematical calculations and studying the laws of winds and tides.' The sound of the bell beating the hour summons his wandering mind to obvious realities. 'Two bells, sir!' calls out a gruff, hearty voice, adding, 'land in sight!' and Lieutenant Ayrton slowly mounts the staircase and surveys the dim blue outline of the distant shore.

How unconscious he is of the peculiar reception awaiting him; where he anticipates kisses and the warm handshaking of friends, he will find the sadness of a broken heart and the threatening muzzles of revolvers in the grasp of angry men. And now he is walking the upper-deck of the beautiful ship, and he is looking up at the stars, thinking of the pleasant events of the morrow. And he is revelling in the pure beauty of the stars; and can we doubt that he thinks them the counterpart of the light that has shone and will shine in her eyes when, clasping her in his loving arms, he kisses her anew?

A schooner dashing southward over boisterous, white-capped waves; all her available canvas set, and still they are constantly hoisting sail after sail, plainly of improvised and novel patterns, until the masts bend with their burdens. A bright sun overhead, a stiff breeze; still they are not content. Why is it? Why is it also that the skipper is chuckling over several broad gold pieces he has had lately added to his not over-luxurious stock—earnests of more to follow? What can be the object in racing so determinedly to the south?

There is no cargo, and there are but three passengers—myself, José, and my 'companion.'

Let me explain. Only this morning, to our amazement, José told us Inez had received a letter from her recreant lover, and we, as their only friends in the village, were invited to be present at the deliberations. The missive had been written in San Francisco, dated 1st October, bore the city and Sonorada post-marks, and was accompanied by a note from the valley postmaster, saying that it had been found in his office that day, buried in some rubbish underneath a counter. We did not read the other letter, but we knew from the changed countenances of brother and sister, that the cloud had lifted, that there surely had been a revelation. All the blame that had been attached to the lieutenant was to be taken back, and an entire exculpation given him. In her face might be read the presence of anxious hope—a hope misty with dreadful apprehensions. Had not her brother Pedro gone to punish the seeming destroyer of her happiness? And might not the revenge be accomplished before the present truth was communicated? We decided speedily the course to pursue, chartered a swift-sailing schooner, and with a favouring breeze were being rapidly carried on our errand.

With the close of the long day we descried the familiar landmarks denoting our nearness to the Golden Gate, and as the last token of the sun's glory reflected from the clouds away out over the sea faded, we made the famous portal—through which have passed the stoutest hearts eager with expectation—entered this time on a merciful message, to prevent, if possible, the spilling of innocent blood. Rounding slowly to the entrance, our keen-eyed captain, after examining the shipping in the harbour, suddenly called us to him, saying: 'The Britisher has arrived!'

Sure enough too; and the huge vessel presented a defiant, somewhat menacing appearance as the schooner glided past to the anchorage. We were gravely apprehensive now; we became still more alarmed and excited when the customs-officer said a boat had just landed with Lieutenant Ayrton and luggage—but thirty minutes since! 'Did the officer know where the lieutenant intended to stop?' 'Yes; they had said the B—Hotel.'

How we rushed through the streets to that hotel; how we collared Pedro as he stood with cocked revolver levelled at the lieutenant, and threw up his arm; how the shot tore harmlessly through the frescoed ceiling; and how happy we four were! The balance of the night has passed into the history of our lives, where it shall always be vividly present. It was a fortunate accomplishment of our design, favoured by luck.

To finish the tale of the suffering which came about through the detention of a mere letter. We sailed merrily northwards under sunny skies the next day, and the happiness on her face when folded in her lover's arms, did my old heart good.

The lieutenant, giving up 'rudder-wrestling,' did settle down to valley life; and hearing from him some few weeks since, I was rejoiced to find him in possession of two beautiful youngsters and the loving help of a true, womanly heart. He represents the Sonorada district in the legislature, and is doing much to regenerate the valley; his active and forcible

mind acting beneficially on the dozy, indolent neighbouring rancheros; and I hear a whisper in the press that the governorship of the State is proposed in his behalf.

THE CHRISTMAS LETTER MISSION.

AMONGST the numerous excellent charities of which this country has just reason to boast, there is none, probably, whose work is more extensive than that operating under the title of the Christmas Letter Mission, notwithstanding the fact that it is so quietly and unobtrusively carried on that possibly many of the readers of this *Journal* may be unaware of its existence. The primary object of this institution is to afford to each of the patients in the numerous hospitals, infirmaries, and the like, which abound throughout the land the pleasure of receiving on Christmas morning a suitable letter, conveying the message of the season, together with a bright Christmas card. That such a surprise, small though the gift may seem, and the sense of being remembered at this cheerful season, should constitute for the often sad and always suffering patients a greeting which it is well worth some pains and thought to bestow, cannot for a moment be doubted; and as it is extremely desirable that the fact of such work being carried on in our midst should be known as widely as possible, we venture to offer a few remarks upon the subject.

Like many other great and successful undertakings, the Christmas Letter Mission sprang from the very smallest beginnings, the idea itself originating in the sick-chamber of a lady at Brighton. Surrounded by and experiencing the many friendly tokens and ministries which love prompts at such a time, the mind of this kind-hearted lady seems to have wandered to the Homes and Hospitals where fellow-creatures also lay ill and suffering, but without the comfort or solace of these little tokens of affection that she herself enjoyed. When in health, she was accustomed to visit such institutions in her own locality, hence these reflections were probably more strongly forced upon her mind; and it was during a night of wakefulness that the bright idea of a letter to each suddenly occurred to her. This was the germ which has since developed into a gigantic Mission, distributing over three hundred thousand letters of friendship and good cheer on Christmas morning, not taking into account the numerous missives that are sent to the colonies and to foreign countries.

No time was lost in maturing and carrying out the idea; and—we are told—one wet and stormy night, just eleven years ago, a little company was gathered round the dining-room table of a Brighton clergyman—the late well-known Rev. Edward B. Elliott of St Mark's—to help in the first and experimental trial of the plan, each member being bound to secrecy. Some hundreds of Christmas cards, printed letters, and envelopes, were laid in piles on the table, and the workers, five in number, methodically set themselves to their task: No. 1 folding; No. 2 placing in envelopes; No. 3 inclosing cards; No. 4 sealing; and No. 5 tying up in parcels of twenty. These letters were destined for the

Sussex County and other Hospitals located in the neighbourhood of Brighton; and the distribution took place on the evening of the 23d December 1871, which was the working Christmas eve that year, as the 25th fell on a Monday. The packets of letters were handed over to the head-nurses of the respective wards in the hospitals visited, after the permission of the chaplains had been duly obtained, with directions to leave one on the pillow of each patient, so that it might there be found on awaking on Christmas morning. The nurses, without exception, entered with interest and pleasure into the plan; and great were the surprise and delight, it is recorded, when Christmas day arrived and each patient found waiting on the pillow a letter with the superscription, 'A Christmas Letter for you.'

This first attempt proved highly successful, and spread as it was carried on from year to year. With the increase of its dimensions, however, the Mission naturally began to feel the want of a central organisation; while the secret method of its operations produced this undesirable result, namely, that while numerous hospitals and infirmaries were over-supplied with letters and cards, many others both in town and country remained uncared for. The importance and indeed necessity of a properly regulated system at length, in 1877, so forced themselves upon the minds of the main workers, that it was actually attempted in the Christmas season of that year, and was attended with great success. Since that date, a complete system has been established throughout the country for carrying on the Christmas Letter Mission work, the staff consisting of one chief Central Secretary, resident in London, for the whole country; and a Central Secretary each for Scotland, Ireland, North Wales, South Wales, Australia, and the Continent of Europe; while every county in England and Wales, each London Postal District, and, as a general rule, each of the large towns, has an effective Secretary of its own. Each of these officials has specified duties to perform, so that the whole system is carried on now with clock-work regularity; for, as we are told, it is absolutely necessary that an organisation of this character should be administered with almost military precision. Every Secretary has a roll of regular workers; and from each county, a return, showing the state of the work, has annually to be forwarded to the chief Central Secretary, who is thereby enabled to ascertain at a glance the particulars of every individual distribution in the kingdom. Schedules, printed and ruled for the purpose, so as to show the name of each hospital and infirmary at which letters were distributed, the name and address of the distributor, and the number of patients to whom the letters were delivered, divided into adults, children, nurses, and servants, with a column for such remarks as may appear necessary, are sent to each town where there is a Secretary, to be filled up and returned to the county Secretary, who is thus enabled to compile the return required at headquarters.

Such is the machinery by means of which the three hundred thousand friendly letters and cards of Christmas greeting are now annually distributed; and—although of course on a smaller scale—it is not at all unlike the vast

system required for the decennial numbering of the people.

One of the first duties of each worker in the Christmas Letter Mission is to obtain the full consent of the chaplain or other authorities of the institution visited; and it is this rule—to which every worker is pledged—that forms the backbone of strength in the work. The result has been the warm and generous support of chaplains and 'Boards' throughout the kingdom.

So successful is the work of the Christmas Letter Mission at the present time, that although hospitals and infirmaries were originally alone contemplated as the objects of this charity, urgent requests are now received from all parts for suitable letters not only for other institutions, such as jails, refuges, workhouses, schools, and such like, but also for individual distribution. Not only, too, is the Christmas Letter Mission's work so extensive in this country, but so far distant as in India, large numbers of these letters and cards, which have been forwarded from here, are also issued; while others, translated into Swedish, German, French, and Italian, are distributed in their respective countries.

In thus indicating the main features of this admirable Mission, it is only right to state that the object underlying the work is not mere temporary amusement, nor is the motive solely to create a Christmas surprise. The work was begun with higher motives, and with such it is still carried on; and, as we may therefore suppose, the great *raison d'être* of the Mission is, in the first place, to do an act of kindness; and in the second, to awaken in the recipients some tender thoughts of the past, or some brighter hopes for the future, on a day which is intended to be one of the happiest in the year. The letters themselves, from what we have seen, are written in a bright and cheerful spirit, each being illustrated with an engraving; and many of them are in verse, especially those for children, embodying in the form of a slight but interesting story the truths desired to be inculcated.

If, as regards the children, the distribution of toys at this season could be incorporated with the present work of the Mission, a vast additional amount of happiness would be created amongst thousands of little ones lying sick and ill in the infirmaries and hospitals. No one truly fond of children can fail to know the appreciation in which toys are held by them at all times, but more particularly when recovering from illness. To a poor child on the bed of illness, even one discarded toy of a richer child would afford a delight not to be conceived or realised by any one whose childhood has been left in the long past. With the machinery possessed by the Christmas Letter Mission, what infinite happiness and amusement might be carried into the hearts of such little ones by the collection and distribution of the old and thrown-away toys of the more fortunately circumstanced children! Nor need the adults be forgotten. Old books of light, entertaining, and healthy literature, periodicals, illustrated papers, and indeed any slight publication likely to interest and benefit the reader, could also through this means be distributed, to lighten and relieve the weary hours of sickness. In this latter field, it is fair to mention that much has already been

done in London by Dr Dawson W. Turner; but although the work he has thus accomplished is really wonderful, it is little to what might be performed through the agency of so powerful and extensive an organisation as that of which we are writing.

Before drawing this paper to a close, there is one important point which must certainly not be omitted, and it is contained in the question: 'Is the work of the Christmas Letter Mission appreciated by those for whom it is undertaken?' If the present and past success, the magnitude and extent of the work, are not a sufficient answer, let it then be given straight from the lips of those most concerned. The Reports of the various Secretaries and workers connected with this vast benevolent system are invariably accompanied with remarks attesting the appreciation on the part of the recipients of the letters and Christmas cards distributed; while numbers are supplemented by actual instances and illustrations of these acknowledgments, and from these we cannot do better than select one or two examples. 'We found,' says one Report, 'one woman very ill and poor and helpless, yet her face plainly told of a peace and joy not of this world; and on my inquiring as to her hopes beyond this life, she said: "Well, ma'am, I can't tell you plain, but them's my sentiments;" and she handed us a Christmas Letter! "It is them blessed words has done me so much good. Why, when I was all alone in the B— Workhouse Infirmary, feeling as if no one knew or cared for me, I found this letter on my pillow. I started! It might be to tell me my husband had died in the Asylum, poor fellow. But no! There was just this letter and a beautiful card; and I began to read it. And little by little the others woke up, and there *was* such a to-do! "You got a letter, Mrs H—; I wish I had one!" And then one and another found a letter and a card; and they were *so* pleased; and it seemed a message from heaven—it did. And I thought the one as wrote it must have knowed what it was to feel lonely, and ill, and tired. I do wish the lady as sent them could know how pleased we all were!"'

In another case, the old people, not content with sending their thanks through the matron of the infirmary where they were patients, selected from among themselves a scribe, and requested the inclosure of an epistle to the Branch Secretary. The letter, which is a curiosity in itself, ran thus:

IN FERMEY.

DEAR MADDAM i have taken the liberty of righting to you for your crissmass presint for wee are 8 of us in our in fermery and wee are all hartley thankfull . . . for wee are all old peepell from 66 up to 95 years of age plase to excuse me for my bad righting. From yours truly
T— G—.

The matron of a city hospital affords the following testimony: 'In my experience, Christmas Day in hospital usually commences with a certain amount of sadness, almost all wishing they were at home with their friends; and their conversation amongst themselves is usually how they enjoyed last Christmas Day, ending in, with rather a sad voice: "But I was well then!" This year was

certainly not so. They were each talking of their cards, and looking bright and happy; and as several of them remarked: "It is so kind of the people outside to think of us!"' The chaplain of one of our largest London hospitals also remarks in the course of a long letter on the subject: 'I am glad to be able to say that all—patients, nurses and servants—thoroughly appreciated them' (the letters and cards).

The testimony of the appreciation of the Christmas letters thus distributed is everywhere the same. It may be of interest to add that in Ireland, the success of the Christmas Letter Mission work is most encouraging; and chaplains, lady-superintendents, and matrons there with one accord acknowledge the glad surprise given to their patients by the receipt of the Christmas missives, reminding them, as it does, of creature-sympathy. Last season, no fewer than five thousand four hundred and fifty letters were issued in Ireland, and the circulation is expected to be greatly extended this year.

After reading the foregoing, many of our readers may be disposed to take a friendly and active interest in the Christmas Letter Mission. It is almost unnecessary to say that so vast a system cannot be carried on without money, and we understand that funds are now very much needed. Those, therefore, who would help the Mission in this respect should send their subscriptions to Miss Steele Elliott, the Treasurer and General Organiser, 66 Mildmay Park, London, N. Those, however, who desire to engage personally and actively in the good work, are requested to address their communications or inquiries on the subject to Miss Strong, the Central Secretary, 67 Ladbroke Grove, Notting Hill, London, W.

IMPROPTUS.

THE impromptu is a form of pleasantry in which the wits and humorists of all ages have more or less indulged. The Greeks and Romans were adepts in this species of humour, and they sometimes enlivened their domestic entertainments by contests in impromptu and other verse-making. On these occasions trifling prizes were given to the most skilful, and many notices of these wit-combats have been handed down to us in classical literature. Impromptu verse-making has also formed one of the principal amusements of certain modern literary societies. One of these associations, to which the well-known writer, poet, and Oriental scholar, William Tennant, belonged, existed at one time at Anstruther, in Scotland, under the title of the 'Muso-manik Society.' At its ordinary meetings, rhymes were given to every member present, which he was required to fill up immediately, on the spur of the moment. On one occasion 'pen, scuffle, men, ruffle,' were given. In a few minutes, lines were produced by the whole party, one set being as follows:

One would suppose a silly pen
A shabby weapon in a scuffle;
But yet the pen of critic men,
A very hero's soul would ruffle.

On another occasion the very uncouth rhymes,

'bubble, jig, stubble, whirligig,' were utilised thus :

What is life?—A smoke, a bubble;
In this gay world, a foolish jig;
A joyless field of barren stubble;
And what is man?—A whirligig.

Queen Elizabeth has been credited with an impromptu which, if not the composition of Her Majesty, smacks very much of that bluffness which she is said to have inherited from her father. It is stated that when the Queen was passing through Coventry on one occasion, the Mayor and Corporation persistently stood in the way to present a loyal address, which ran somewhat in this fashion :

We men of Coventree
Are very glad to see
Your gracious Majestie.
Good Lord, how fair ye be !

To which Her Majesty at once replied :

Her gracious Majestie
Is very wroth to see
Ye men of Coventree.
Good Lord, what fools ye be !

Political events have, of course, given rise to innumerable impromptus. Thus, in 1765, one Williams, a bookseller, published the celebrated *North Briton* of Wilkes, and for so doing was condemned to stand in the pillory in Palace Yard for one hour on the first of March. A collection of two hundred pounds was made for Williams on the spot, and one of the spectators wrote on the pillory-scaffold the impromptu :

Martyrs of old for truth thus bravely stood,
Laid down their lives, and shed their dearest blood ;
No scandal then to suffer in her cause,
And nobly stem the rigour of the laws :
Pulpit and desk may equally go down,
A pillory's now more sacred than a [crown].

The notorious election for Westminster of 1784 gave rise to a number of clever impromptus. The return of Charles Fox on this occasion was due in a great measure to the exertions of the beautiful Duchess of Devonshire, who with her sister, Lady Duncannon, visited the humblest of the electors. On one occasion the Duchess is said to have given a butcher a kiss in order to gain his vote, which drew forth the following :

Condemn not, prudes, fair Devon's plan,
In giving Steel a kiss ;
In such a cause, for such a man
She could not do amiss.

This incident was caricatured in innumerable pictures, and one individual wrote :

Arrayed in matchless beauty, Devon's fair
In Fox's favour takes a zealous part ;
But oh ! where'er the pilferer comes, beware,
She supicates a vote, and steals a heart !

The business of the Senate has naturally given rise in many instances to amusing impromptus. Thus Lord Sandon replying in the House of Commons to a question, announced that forty-six cattle had died in Lincolnshire of drinking water. An ardent teetotaler—a member of the House, distinguished equally for his humour and his

zeal for temperance legislation—promptly penned the following :

When forty-six cattle have perished by water,
To alter our system it's time to begin ;
Let's feed them in future on beer or on porter,
On rum, or on brandy, on whisky or gin.
Like beasts let them drink without stoppage or pause,
Refilling their buckets again and again :
Till at last we are able to say with just cause—
'These beasts are as wise and as worthy as men.'
Then hail to the system promoted by Sandon !
Henceforward our life will more pleasantly glide,
When our flocks and our herds shall all water abandon,
And our cattle lie peacefully drunk at our side.

This species of wit is not, however, confined to the British Senate; for at a sitting of the American House of Representatives, not many years since, one of the members—Mr Horr—delivered himself of the following impromptu epitaph on Mr S. Cox, another member :

Beneath this slab lies the great Sam Cox,
Who was wise as an owl and brave as an ox :
Think it not strange his turning to dust,
For he swelled and he swelled till he finally bust.
Just where he has gone, or just how he fares,
Nobody knows and nobody cares ;
But wherever he is, be he angel or elf,
Be sure, dear reader, he's puffing himself.

Some very witty impromptus have at times been made by the limbs of the law. Joseph Jekyll, for instance, the greatest legal wit of the reign of George III., bored with the long-winded speech of a prosy serjeant, wrote on a slip of paper, which was in due course passed along the barristers' benches of the court where he sat :

The serjeants are a grateful race,
Their dress and language show it ;
Their purple garments come from Tyre,
Their arguments go to it.

On another occasion, when a well-known counsel was doing his best in cross-examination to get an acknowledgment from an elderly unmarried lady that certain money in dispute had been tendered, Jekyll threw him the couplet :

Garrow, forbear ; that tough old jade
Will never prove a tender maid.

So again, when Lord Chancellor Eldon and Sir Arthur Piggott each stood out in court for his own pronunciation of the word *lien*—Eldon pronouncing it like *lion*, and Piggott like *lean*—Jekyll, alluding to the parsimonious arrangements of the Chancellor's kitchen, perpetrated the following impromptu :

Sir Arthur, Sir Arthur, why, what do you mean,
By saying the Chancellor's *lien* is *lean* ?
D'ye think that his kitchen's so bad as all that,
That nothing within it can ever get fat ?

Sir George Rose, another great lawyer, was noted for the excellence of his witticisms in court and elsewhere. The following double impromptu took place at a dinner-table between Sir George and James Smith, one of the authors of the celebrated *Rejected Addresses*, in allusion to Craven Street, Strand, where Smith resided. Smith wrote :

At the top of my street the attorneys abound,
And down at the bottom the barges are found.
Fly, Honesty, fly, to some safer retreat ;
For there's craft in the river, and craft in the street.

Sir George replied :

Why should Honesty fly to some safer retreat,
From attorneys and barges, od rot 'em?
For the lawyers are just at the top of the street,
And the barges are just at the bottom.

Lord Thomas Erskine also was celebrated in his day for his wit, and was the author of many capital impromptus. An amusing specimen was that made on his hearing that a certain house in Red Lion Square, once occupied by a distinguished counsel, had been taken by an ironsmith :

This house, where once a lawyer dwelt,
Is now a smith's—Alas!
How rapidly the Iron Age
Succeeds the Age of Brass.

The lawyers, however, have not always had the best of the argument, for on a certain occasion an attorney thinking to make a joke at the expense of a journalist, sent him the following lines :

I slept in an editor's bed last night,
When no other chance to be nigh;
How I thought, as I tumbled the editor's bed,
How easily editors lie!

The journalist was equal to the occasion, and immediately penning the following lines, sent them to the lawyer :

If the lawyer slept in the editor's bed,
When no lawyer chanced to be nigh;
And though he has written, and naively said,
How easily editors lie;
He must then admit, as he lay on that bed
And slept to his heart's desire,
Whatever he may say of the editor's bed,
'Twas the lawyer himself was the liar.

Our literary celebrities have contributed their full share to this amusing kind of pleasantry, and even the sedate Dr Johnson, in his lighter moments, was the author of a number of these poetical trifles, one of the best being that written to Mrs Thrale on that lady's completing her thirty-fifth year :

Off in danger, yet alive,
We are come to thirty-five;
Long may better years arrive,
Better years than thirty-five;
Could philosophers contrive
Life to stop at thirty-five,
Time his hours should never drive
O'er the bounds of thirty-five.
High to soar, and deep to drive,
Nature gives at thirty-five.
Ladies, stock and tend your live,
Trifle not at thirty-five;
For, howe'er we boast and strive,
Life declines from thirty-five:
He that ever hopes to thrive,
Must begin by thirty-five;
And all who wisely wish to wive
Must look on Thrale at thirty-five.

Mr Clarke, in his *Autobiographical Recollections of the Medical Profession*, tells a pleasant anecdote of Cowper in which an impromptu rendering of a verse of *John Gilpin* forms the point of the story. Mr Wilson, a hairdresser, was in the habit of resorting to Cowper's house to shave the poet, who on these occasions was generally silent. One day Wilson was shaving away in silence, when it was broken by the following circumstance. Cowper was that day to dine with Lady Austen at Clifton. Wilson had left home to be punctual

to his engagement, and had told his man to bring Mr Cowper's best wig after him—the wig having been specially dressed for the occasion. When Wilson had finished, Cowper suddenly exclaimed : 'Oh, Mr Wilson, my wig!' Wilson, who was a wit, immediately quoted in answer, from the poet's well-known poem :

I came before your wig was done;
But if I well forebode,
It certainly will soon be here,
It is upon the road.

'Very well applied, indeed, Mr Wilson,' quoth the poet.

Byron has left us several impromptus, one of the most amusing being written in the travellers' book at Orchomenus, in Greece, in reply to the following lines, written in the book by another traveller :

Fair Albion, smiling, sees her son depart,
To trace the birth and nursery of art:
Noble his object, glorious is his aim;
He comes to Athens, and he writes his name.

Beneath this verse Byron wrote :

The modest bard, like many a bard unknown,
Rhymes on our names, but wisely hides his own;
But yet, who'er he be, to say no worse,
His name would bring more credit than his verse.

Here is a story of Thackeray and Albert Smith. The latter once wrote in the album of a young lady who was sojourning in Switzerland the following feeble impromptu :

Mont Blanc is the monarch of mountains—
They crowned him long ago;
But *who* they got to put it on,
Nobody seems to know.

Thackeray, being asked by the same lady to contribute to her collection, examined the contents of her book, and coming across the above lines of Albert Smith's, at once penned the following :

I know that Albert wrote in hurry;
To criticise I scarce presume;
But yet methinks that Lindley Murray,
Instead of *who*, had written *whom*.

Theodore Hook, the wittiest man of his day, was a most prolific impromptuist. No matter what the occasion or the subject, Hook could improvise verses—and witty ones too—upon it. On one occasion as Hook and Mathews the actor were rowing up the river, they saw a notice-board on a lawn forbidding any one to land there. Hook at once invented a scheme. He and Mathews landed, with fishing-rods and lines. Hook acted the land-surveyor, Mathews the clerk. They began to measure with the fishing-rods as measuring and levelling staffs, and the fishing-lines as yard and rood measures. Presently the owner appeared, and began to soundly rate the interlopers; but Hook quietly stated that a canal was to be cut directly across the lawn, and that measurements were necessary for the work. The owner of the lawn ultimately asked them in to talk the matter over; a good dinner and capital wines were ready; over which the gentleman tried to persuade the surveyor that another line for the canal might be easily obtained without touching his lawn. Hook at length revealed the hoax, and narrated the

whole transaction in impromptu verse, the narrative winding up with :

And we greatly approve of your fare ;
Your cellar's as prime as your cook ;
And this clerk here is Mathews the player ;
And my name, sir, is—Theodore Hook.

On another occasion, Hook was singing an extempore comic song at the house of a friend, when the servant entered and said : ' Please, sir, here's Mr Winter, the collector of taxes.' Hook immediately sung :

Here comes Mr Winter, collector of taxes ;
I'd advise you to pay him whatever he axes.
Excuses won't do ; he stands no sort of flummery ;
Though Winter's his name, his process is summary.

Many other clever impromptus might be cited, but that which has just been given reminds us that we must not further tax the patience of our readers.

CHLORAL.

THE age we live in is remarkable for the progress that has been made in scientific discovery, and in this progress medical research has benefited equally with other branches of science. Even in the small way of household remedies, we are thankful for an apparent reform. The bitter potions of senna and rhubarb are no longer common, and now we have doses for childhood served up in the shape of elegant and toothsome comfits. In the higher walks of medical reform, scientific research has done much to alleviate human suffering ; increased attention has been paid to the proper action of medicines, and this to a great extent has been due to exact physiological research.

One example of the results which have been derived from physiological research is to be found in the discovery of the hypnotic or soporific properties of chloral by Dr Liebreich of Berlin—a discovery entirely due to a very simple conjunction of chemical and physiological facts, and a series of experiments based thereon. The simplicity of the discovery will be clearly seen when we have explained what chloral is, and some of its relations to other well-known substances. The word chloral is a combination of two words, chlorine and alcohol, formed by combining the first syllable of each. It is prepared by the action of dry chlorine gas upon alcohol ; and the liquid chloral which is the product of the action is distilled into a large flask constructed to receive it. The product thus obtained is not used in medicine ; but when it is mixed with a certain proportion of water, it forms a crystalline compound called hydrate of chloral, and is the article commonly known as ' chloral.' When hydrate of chloral is heated with an alkali, chloroform is produced ; and it was the knowledge of this fact which led Dr Liebreich to suppose that if chloral were introduced into the circulation of animals, the alkaline nature of the blood would cause slow evolution of chloroform from the chloral, and consequently sleep would be produced.

After Dr Liebreich had carefully noted the various effects produced by his new remedy upon the lower animals, he ventured to take a dose himself, which he did at different times, both subcutaneously and in a draught. By both methods he found the result to be the same—a deep dreamless sleep, lasting from six to ten hours, according to the dose taken.

The announcement of Dr Liebreich's discovery was warmly received by the medical profession, who regarded it almost as a fulfilment of the prediction which was made many years ago by Sir James Y. Simpson, that ' a drug would yet be found which would possess all the virtues of opium without its baneful effects.' Such a drug, Liebreich's chloral seemed to be ; and if success were to be judged by the quantity used, Dr Liebreich must have had no cause to complain. It is a remarkable fact that such drugs as chloral invariably become popular outside the medical profession. The reason of this is not far to seek, when we think of the number of persons who suffer from insomnia, and to whom opium possesses too many apparent horrors. One would scarcely grudge the wearied brain anything which will bring it rest, for is not sleep the sovereign balm for all ills ? But, unhappily, the use of medicines that induce sleep is attended with the greatest risk of abuse, for the wearied frame and the conscience-stricken or troubled mind drive their unhappy possessors to larger and larger doses of their potent soother. Such, too, is the case with chloral. There are records of many fatal cases from its use, some of which have been accidental—that is to say, in which an ordinary dose produced death ; but in the great majority of deaths, large and poisonous doses have been taken.

Chloral has a direct action upon the heart and the brain, so that when either of these organs is in an abnormal condition, the dangers to be apprehended from its use are not a few. Its action differs very much from that of opium, for the victims of the latter seldom die from the immediate influence of the drug, but rather from some organic disease brought on by its use. Now, chloral accumulates in the system until such a quantity is present as will stop all organic functions ; but death in these cases generally results from an interference with the heart's action, or from a sort of suspension of the nervous stimuli—the nature of the death thus being not unlike that of chronic alcoholism.

Many chloral-drinkers have been dipsomaniacs at one time or other, and have drifted from the use of alcohol to the chloral bottle, or have moderated their consumption of alcohol by the conjunction of chloral. Although chloral-drinking is not so apparent as dram-drinking, yet it has even a greater power over its victims ; and as its immediate effects are not so degrading as those of alcohol, they imagine that it is not so ruinous as the latter ; but it is the result of an insatiable desire, and as such, it becomes an infatuating and degrading vice. The consumption of the drug has, we are glad to note, greatly decreased during the past few years, for a knowledge of the evils of its indiscriminate use has been acquired, and a proper place in therapeutics has been assigned to it.

We hope we have said enough to show the

evil of the habit of chloral-drinking, and that it is far better to try Nature's own remedies for sleeplessness, than to resort to such dangerous remedies as those we have been considering. Sleep-inducing medicines are for the pain-troubled patient under medical treatment, not for the man or woman who is able to go about his or her daily round of duties.

A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CURIOSITY.

In the course of our experience we have seen many curiosities of literature, but none that could rival in uniqueness and originality one which was printed in Paris and entitled 'The new Guide of the Conversation in Portuguese and English,' by Pedro Carolino. An author of an educational work should beyond all others be thoroughly acquainted with his subject, but the wording of the title will no doubt be sufficient to give an idea of the merits of the book. The true aims and pretensions of the work can, however, only be learned from the preface, which runs as follows: 'A choice of familiar dialogues, clean of gallicisms, and despoiled phrases, it was missing yet to studious portuguese and brazilian Youth; and also to persons of other nations, that wish to know the Portuguese language. We sought all we may do, to correct that want, composing and divising the present little work in two parts. The first includes a greatest vocabulary proper names by alphabetical order; and the second forty-three Dialogues adapted to the usual precisions of the life. For that reason we did put, with a scrupulous exactness, a *great variety own expressions* to english and portuguese idioms; without to attach us selves (as make some others) almost at a literal translation; translation what only will be for to accustom the portuguese pupils, or foreign, to *speak very bad* any of the mentioned idioms.

'We were increasing this second edition with a phraseology, in the first part, and some familiar letters, anecdotes, *idiotisms*, proverbs, and to second a coin's index.

'The Works which we were conferring for this labour, fond use us for nothing; but those what were publishing to Portugal, or out, they were almost all composed for some foreign, or for some national little acquainted in the spirit of both languages. It was resulting from that carelessness to rest these Works fill of imperfections, and anomalies of style: in spite of the infinite typographical faults which sometimes invert the sense of the periods. It increase not to contain any of those Works the figured pronunciation of the english words, nor the prosodical accent in the portuguese; indispensable object whom wish to speak the english and portuguese languages correctly.

'We expect then, who the little book (for the care what we wrote him, and for her typographical correction) that may be worth the acceptance of the studious persons, and especially of the Youth, at which we dedicate him particularly.'

Notwithstanding the great care with which the author wrote the work, we are forced to the conclusion that it is not quite free from 'despoiled phrases.' The author candidly states that he has

introduced into his work a great variety of his own expressions, and it may not be out of place to quote a few. Thus, in the English dialogues we find such expressions as: 'This coat go to (fits) you,' 'It is a blunt man,' 'She do not tell me nothing,' 'There is it two years what my father is dead,' 'It must never to laugh of the unhappies.' After this there is hope for all, even the veriest tyros in literature, more especially when they are assured that the work from which the foregoing phrases are extracted, has gone through two editions!

Fact, we are told, is stranger than fiction; and for the future it should always be remembered when reading humorous specimens of pigeon-English, that however exaggerated these may appear, they have been excelled in a seriously written work.

NOVEMBER.

SCARCE one brief sun-ray gilds the sombre gloom
That veils the mountains; the bright summer-blue
Is but a memory; and gray and dun
The cheerless landscape, wrapped in watery mist,
Foretells the advent of grim Winter's reign!

Fast wanes the Autumn! Thick the showering leaves
Whirl brown and russet o'er the wind-swept path
In eddying circles; and the fitful gusts
Bend to their will, with a fierce wrathful wail,
The gaunt black fir-tops; all the heather-lands,
Their purple glories gone, lie sere and bare,
Scarce yielding scanty shelter in their range
To the crouched shivering grouse-troop.

Here and there,
A lingering daisy stars the homestead field
With speck of white; and in the garden-beds,
In bright array of crimson and of gold,
Gleam the chrysanthemums: all else shows drear,
And gray, and colourless.

But soon shall fall,
On all around, the pure and spotless snow,
To shroud the buried beauties Nature wraps
Deep in their Winter sleep, till Spring again,
With her bright train of buds and blossoms fair,
Green opening leaves, and choir of tuneful birds,
Warm sunny days, balm-scented dewy nights,
Shall smiling come, and with her magic touch
Make glad with Life and Beauty all the Earth!

A. H. B.

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2d. To insure return in case of ineligibility, postage-stamps should accompany every manuscript.

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